

# BRO

The Berkshire Record Office  
The Archives of the Royal County

## The Berkshire Echo Issue 47

- ❖ [New Source for Local History: Slough Building Control Plans](#)
- ❖ [A Rate Good Read](#)
- ❖ [Huge new resource for Reading's local history](#)
- ❖ [New to the Archives](#)

### From the Editor

I have never had much luck with finding plans for houses I've lived in. Survival rates for plans tend to be all or nothing, and I've always had the nothing. Most frustratingly when I lived on Tyneside virtually every local authority had kept all its planning applications since Victorian times - all that is, except Whitley Bay Municipal Borough, where I was. This issue of the Echo focuses on local history through local authority records, highlighting rate books and plans. The survival of such plans in Berkshire is far worse than on Tyneside, so it is all the more notable that such a fine collection for Slough has found its way to BRO, and is now available for research. Of the Berkshire towns, only Windsor is similarly represented.

Everyone likes a picture to look at. Plans are like an archival scratchcard - an immediate research result with one glance. The Slough plans deserve to be well-used, as they tell the tale of the development of one of England's touchstone towns. We hope to see both them and the Reading rate books become two of our more popular collections. The survival of rate books in Berkshire is much better than plans, and they can let you build up a picture of community history - for streets, villages or areas - which lets everyone get an idea of where they live.

Local identity is quite a diffuse thing in the home counties, and I guess we all might struggle to define what it means to be a Berkshire person today. Historically a Berkshire resident would have most likely been an agricultural labourer or worked in the cloth trade, neither of which is probably how we would define the county now. We have largely lost the distinct Berkshire accent, our population comes and goes with international industries, and the east of the county particularly may see itself as leaning towards London rather than the rural life. London itself may provide a clue as to today's Berkshire identity - as a fluid descriptive mix rather than a settled descriptive fix. Within that, plans, rate books and other archives allow us to explore where we've come from, and where we are going. Interesting stuff!



Mark Stevens  
Senior Archivist

### DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

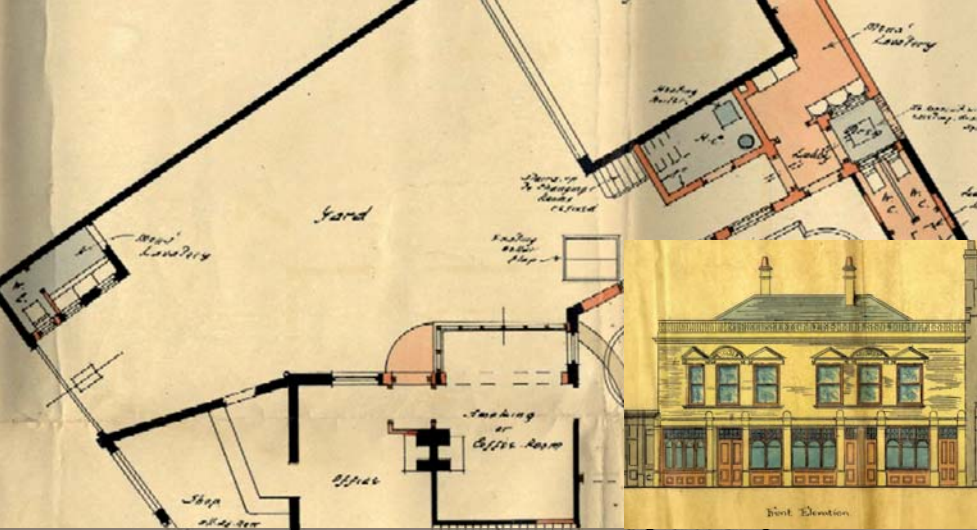
#### NEW TO BRO?

Find out more about your family or local history with a visit to the BRO. Why not put your name down for one of our free Introductory Visits and we can show you how to get started. Upcoming dates for 2009 are: 20 April, 6 July, 5 October. Just call us on (0118) 901 5132 or ask at Reception to book your place.

#### ALL ABOARD FOR DIDCOT HISTORY DAY

Berkshire Record Office will join Oxfordshire Record Office at an event to highlight Didcot's history on Saturday 13 June. Explore Didcot's past through the photographs, maps, documents and artefacts on display. BRO staff will be on hand to answer questions, as will experts from museums, libraries and local groups. This free event will be held from 10am-3pm at the Cornerstone Arts Centre, 25 Station Road, Didcot, OX11 7NE. For further details, please contact the Didcot Library, tel: 01235 813103.





## The Grapes Public House, Windsor Road: supporting local sports

In 1900 the brewers Thomas Wethered & Sons submitted an application for a proposed new hotel to be erected on the site of the beerhouse known as The Grapes. The building was to be built of brick with stone dressings and was situated on the corner of Bath Road and Windsor Road. Included in the application are detailed plans, sections and elevations by architect James H Deacon of Marlow (S/SB2/935).

The next application from Thomas Wethered & Sons came in 1934. It proposes to convert the loft over the garage adjoining 'The Grapes' into changing rooms, bathrooms and WC for Slough Rugby Football Club. A letter from architect Percy J Rowe says that the directors are anxious that the building work is carried out as soon as possible as the playing season has already started. The plan shows that most of the work was internal and the main external construction was a steel staircase coming up through the roof of the present tea shelter. At this time the notice of intended new building lists the tenant as a 'Mrs Smith' (S/SB2/4019).

A year later a further application was submitted for internal alterations to 'The Grapes'. The drawings by G Berkeley Wills show that by this time much of the internal layout of the public house has already been altered although the bar area is fairly similar to the original plan. The proposed alterations are mainly to extend the pub toward the rear, converting the kitchen into a lounge and tearoom and creating space for further lavatories. Interestingly at this time the front elevation of the building is fairly different to that in the original plan. This may mean that the original plan was not carried out exactly as shown in the drawings or that there were other applications between these dates which do not survive (S/SB2/4286).

## New Source for Local History: Slough Building Control Plans

### Major Cataloguing Project Completed

The cataloguing of over 7000 building control plans for Slough has now been completed. This project was started in 2003 by archivist Lisa Spurrier and continued by archivist Ellie Thorne in October 2007. The plans date from 1880-1948 and chronicle the development of Slough from a small town to an important industrial and commercial centre. The plans include drawings of the buildings, the original applications, correspondence with the applicants and notice of whether the application was approved or refused.

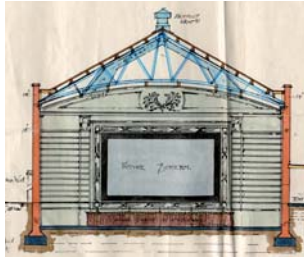
The catalogue for the plans can be found in the appendices to Slough Borough Records (S/). The plans have been divided into three series, reflecting their original arrangement. The main series dates from 1880-1948 and relates to plans that were sent in for approval from the council before building could begin (S/SB2/1-7790). The second series deals with applications for signs between 1928-1945, including pub signs, shop illuminations and advertising hoardings (S/SB3/1-116). The final series includes a small number of drainage plans from 1897-1921, although drainage plans can also be found in the main series before and after these dates (S/SB4/1-28). In addition to the plans there is also a series of registers of plans that give the names of the applicants and details of the application (S/SB1/1-8).

The plans cover projects ranging from small garden sheds to entire housing estates and include many plans for factories on the Slough Trading Estate. Nearly all properties in Slough built either during or prior to this period will be included in some form, be it as an application for the initial construction, or for alterations or extensions such as the building of a shed or garage or the conversion of a bedroom into a bathroom. Applications received during World War 2 are included and there are several applications for air-raid shelters on the Slough Trading Estate and for altering factories to be used for war work. The plans are a particularly valuable research tool for people interested in house history. As a collection, they offer invaluable insight into the town of Slough and the development of buildings over this period.

Top: Floor plan of The Grapes, 1935  
Top right inset: Front elevation of The Grapes, 1900



## Palace Cinema, High Street: famous architect's firm designs a big screen for Slough



There are nine separate applications for this cinema in the building control plans. They show its development from the initial plan for the building, then known as the Cinema Hall, in 1919, through some extensions and alterations, to its re-roofing in 1946. The original building was designed by the company of the famous theatre architect Frank Matcham in 1919 and the application includes detailed coloured plans of the stalls and balconies, and sections showing the picture screen. (S/SB2/1756)

In 1920 small alterations were proposed to the office areas of the cinema (Frank Matcham & Co) (S/SB2/1778) but there were no further developments for ten years until the projector room was altered in 1930 (S/SB2/2671 and 2796) and neon tube signs were installed by the company Electrolumination Ltd in 1933 (S/SB3/36). The original application of 1919 includes later correspondence relating to the proposed refurbishment of the cinema in 1936. In 1937, an application was received from Kenneth Friese-Greene for extensions to the rear of the cinema (which has become the Palace Cinema). Later in that year a new canopy was erected whilst the cinema was closed for four weeks in the summer so it is probable that the extensions were also carried out during this time (S/SB2/5095). The final application held for this cinema was submitted in 1946 and includes detailed technical drawings relating to the re-roofing of the cinema by the engineers Dawnays Ltd (S/SB2/6804). The cinema only survived for another twelve years after this and was demolished in 1958.



## A Rate Good Read

Rate books record taxes paid to a local authority, to finance the services it provides. Have you ever thought of using them in your family or local history research? Entries always include owner's name, address and type of property, rateable value and amount levied. You may also find name of occupier (head of household).

No other occupants are listed, and personal names are not always recorded in full. Even so, used with other sources rate books can be useful for:

- studying all kinds of property: residential, commercial and industrial.
- filling gaps between the publication of trade directories and censuses.
- tracing owners and occupiers before 1918 who do not appear in electoral registers.
- finding the rough age of a property (in this case mid-19C onwards), its relative value and size, changes to street names and numbering, and the number of occupied houses and tenements in a locality.

## Huge new resource for the history of Reading

A cataloguing project to make available the rate books for Reading Borough has now been completed. Nearly 500 rate books are now available for consultation, many enormously large and heavy. Many have been copied onto microfiche to make them easier to consult. They date from 1850-1962 and can be found under the reference R/FR1-5. The following case study reveals how rate books can be used to discover patterns of property ownership, and solve problems of property numbering.

## Case Study: Union Street

Union Street, Reading, is an alley linking Friar Street and Broad Street, crowded with little shops and known to many as "Smelly Alley". Between 1870 and 1885 most of its twenty or so properties were owned by one person, beginning with a [Mr] Pursey in the 1870s. Property numbers first appear in Union Street in 1878. Alfred Embury, Henry Howett and Martin Lyons were the only occupiers who remained throughout the period, and Jane Pidgeon was the only owner-occupier.

The rateable value of most properties rose from £6 8s to £11 10s in the fifteen years examined. Beware of research pitfalls, however: in 1884, shops spring up all along the street, only because the rate book does not identify them as such before.

Number 12 Union Street is usually listed separately, much further on in the volume. The current number 12 Union Street is a shop selling t-shirts and posters, which many of you may have walked by on your way to the Berkshire Record Office.

If a Reading person or building eludes you in better-known sources, the newly accessible rate books are a good next step. Rating records for other locations are also available at the Berkshire Record Office.

BOROUGH OF READING, IN THE COUNTY OF BERKS.				
of Assessment.	Name of Occupier	Name of Owner	Description of Property Rated.	Name or Situation of the Property
159	Walter Anne	Lord	House of 4 rooms	17 Market Street
160	Anthony Alfred	"	"	"
161	Arthur George	"	"	"
162	Baron J.B.	"	"	"
163	Booker Henry	"	"	"

Top left: Palace cinema screen, 1919 / Above: Reading rate books in strongroom  
Right: Extract from rate book showing Union Street





READING ABBEY, in BERKSHIRE. Plate 2.

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### Architecture & archaeology

The focus of this issue must be the completion of cataloguing of the almost complete set of building control plans and other records for Slough, 1880-1948 (S/SB), highlighted inside. The collection includes nearly 7000 sets of plans, and the project has taken several years to complete. Architecture is also represented by plans for the replacement for Yattendon Court, 1925-1927 (D/EX2094), and plans and papers relating to Berkshire projects undertaken by Carden & Godfrey of London, 1964-1992 (D/EX2028). The latter includes alterations to Arborfield Church and to the 15th century Bell Inn, Waltham St Lawrence.

Berkshire Archaeological Society also had architectural origins, as it was founded as Reading Architectural Association in 1871, as a professional body for local architects and others interested in architecture. Members were interested in archaeology from the start, and within a few years the archaeological side had almost completely taken over. From the 1870s the society campaigned against the demolition of interesting old buildings, as a pioneer of the conservation movement. Members were also generally interested in local history, and in the 1930s were at the forefront of discussions concerning the proposals to start a Record Office for Berkshire - plans forestalled by World War 2. The extensive archive has now been catalogued and is available for research here (D/EX2039), joining the Society's library of secondary material at BRO. The Society is still a flourishing organisation.

### Clubs & societies

The archives of clubs and societies help to illuminate our forebears' leisure pursuits. Recent arrivals include the records of Windsor Ladies' Swimming Club, 1920-1955 (D/EX1958). Before World War 2 the hardy members swam mainly in the River Thames. Also catalogued are the records of the Reading Wheelers cycling club, 1934-1968 (D/EX2068). The records of the Wallingford branch of the Junior Imperial and Constitutional League (D/EX2055, for pre-war young Conservatives) reveal members' interests from local history to boating. They also enjoyed singing patriotic songs and holding debates - a hot topic in the 1930s was whether working women were stealing 'men's jobs'. The 'Social Studies Journal' of Reading West Townswomen's Guild, 1959-1969, includes a record of a visit to the Record Office in 1967 (D/EX2051).

## New to the Archives

### School records

We have received the admission registers of Sir Charles Russell's School, Swallowfield, 1873-1908 (SCH17), and records of Reading Teachers' Centre, 1970-c.1983 (D/EX2081).

### Local authority & health records

The series of Berkshire County Council contracts has now been listed up to 1961 (C/CL/L2). We have also been given a copy of the booklet given to all new electors by Reading Borough in 1965 (D/EX2028). Newly deposited material from Sunningdale Parish Council includes records of the charities managed by the council from 1896 onwards (CPC150B). Other parish councils to have deposited records recently are Yattendon (CPC159), Aldermaston, 1940-1995 (CPC3), and Tilehurst, 1901-2000 (CPC132). Yattendon is of special interest for the fact that it had a female chairman, Mrs Elizabeth Waterhouse, from 1906-1913 - a time at which women were not eligible to vote! Finally, we have catalogued the records of West Berkshire Community Health Council, 1974-2003 (P/HA3).



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Please call us for further details.

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